



## **Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches**

**Judiciary Committee Public Hearing  
Monday, March 7, 2011**

**TESTIMONY OF SCOT X. ESDAILE, PRESIDENT OF THE CONNECTICUT  
STATE CONFERENCE OF NAACP BRANCHES  
AND NATIONAL BOARD MEMBER**

**In SUPPORT of SB-1035 and HB-6425 *AN ACT REPEALING THE DEATH  
PENALTY AND AN ACT REVISING THE PENALTY FOR CAPITAL FELONIES***

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Brenda Milner, Executive Assistant to Scot X. Esdaile, President of the Connecticut State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am here on behalf of the State of Connecticut's NAACP. Any serious discussion of the death penalty would be incomplete without a discussion about the role race plays. While African Americans make up just over 10% of the population of Connecticut, 45% of murder victims in the state are people of color. Clearly, we have a stake in the debate about how society should respond to violent crime.

In 2009, the last year for which we have complete statistics, there were 107 homicides in Connecticut. A large portion of these crimes took place in our inner cities. There is a great need in these communities for effective responses to violent crime. We need law enforcement programs that work to prevent crime from occurring, and in the wake of homicide, victims' survivors need help. They need funds to bury their children, ongoing counseling, and a support network. Victims of crime are more likely to be re-victimized or become offenders themselves as opposed to the rest of the population.

Statistics show time and again that the color of skin of victims is one of the most telling indicators of whether or not someone will get a death sentence. Across the country, 80% of those on death row are there for killing a white victim.

We know that a system run by human beings is never perfect and reflects the problems in the broader society. We know that socio economic status as well as race and ethnicity affect the decisions that human beings make. This knowledge is supported by the data and many recent studies. The reality is that in an imperfect world, a consistently fair and unbiased system is not possible.

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The numbers show that, in addition to homicide survivors, people of color are unduly affected by the death penalty system in other ways. In Connecticut, people of color comprise over half of the men on death row. In the last two years, four men have been exonerated from murder charges because they were actually innocent. 3 of these four men were people of color. It is not enough to have a system that evades discrimination and legitimately tries to keep bias out of decision making. We must deal with the world as it really is not how we wish it to be. Human beings are fallible; historically they are frightened of people who are different from them. In such a world, the death penalty is not an option.

The NAACP requests that you repeal the death penalty. The NAACP is **adamantly** against the death penalty. We would prefer you use the funds for this exorbitantly expensive system to fund victim services, substance abuse and violence prevention programs. Please show the communities of color that their opinion counts too.

Thank you.